



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Reginald Goodson, City Manager
James E. Avens Jr., Interim Chief of Police
Darrell Felton, Administrative Captain

DATE: February 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Consideration - Approve a Mid-Year Salary Increase for Sworn Personnel & Police Recruits as a Means to Address the High Vacancy Rate Over Last 24-Month Period

BACKGROUND:

Law Enforcement in Eastern North Carolina is a highly competitive job field. The seven counties in District 1 contain eight municipal police departments, one university police agency, one hospital campus police agency, and seven sheriffs' offices. Those 17 law enforcement entities compete for the small number of certified law enforcement officers in our region. The number of new law enforcement candidates is in a steady decline. In the 1990s and 2000s, COA's Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) program graduated 50 to 60 new cadets each year. Currently, the program graduates only 20 to 30 new cadets annually, which does not keep up with attrition.

Officers are retiring, moving for higher pay and benefits, and in some cases abandoning the profession altogether. There is an urgent need to increase salaries to attract new officers and entice current staff to remain with their respective agencies. These pay increases initiated a salary and benefit race and the Elizabeth City Police Department fell woefully behind. Currently, the ECPD is situated last in salaries as compared to surrounding agencies.

Additionally, several neighboring agencies offer incentives for law enforcement certifications, which increase an officer's base salary. On June 17, 2024, the Chowan County Sheriff's Office posted its salary and benefits package on Facebook, stating that they offered \$50,000 for non-certified applicants and \$52,000 for certified officers. On

October 6, 2024, the Edenton Police Department posted its starting salary and benefits package for BLET graduates as \$41,811, and noted that they offered additional salary for certified officers. Just two months later, on December 17, 2024, the Edenton Police Department increased its salary to \$53,000 for BLET cadets and \$55,000 after BLET, plus the offer of additional salary for experienced certified officers. The Southern Shores Police Department's base salary for certified officers is \$55,072, with an optional supplement of \$8,700, totaling \$63,772. The Elizabeth City Police Department's salary for BLET cadets is \$39,684, which is \$13,316 less than the Edenton Police Department. For BLET graduates, the ECPD offers \$44,086, which is \$10,914 less than the Edenton Police Department.

Agency	In BLET	After BLET
Elizabeth City Police Department	\$39,684	\$46,836
Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE)		\$54,000
Elizabeth City State University		\$53,500
Camden	\$46,800	
Chowan County Sheriff's Office	\$50,000	\$52,000
Currituck County Sheriff's Office	\$43,000	\$55,000
Edenton Police Department	\$53,000	\$55,000
Nags Head Police Department		\$55,954
Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office	\$44,161	
Town of Southern Shores		\$55, 072

ANALYSIS:

Traditionally, recruitment and retention practices were addressed separately; however, these are connected issues for law enforcement. When retention is high, recruitment needs are low or nonexistent. Conversely, low retention increases an agency's recruitment needs. The Elizabeth City Police Department needs to improve its retention campaign due to the loss of experienced officers. ECPD has a great recruitment program. ECPD hired 27 recruits from January 2022 through November 2024 to send to BLET; however, we ultimately lost 16 of those BLET cadets to the other agencies due to offers of higher pay. Additionally, from January 2022 through February 2025, the ECPD had 38 sworn officers resign to accept jobs with other law enforcement agencies.

Several of the agencies where our experienced former officers are now employed are located in close proximity to Elizabeth City. We have lost nine (9) to Elizabeth City State University Police (9); eight (8) to the Currituck County Sheriff's Office; six (6) to the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office; two (2) to the Chowan County Sheriff's Office (2); two (2) to NC Alcohol Law Enforcement; one (1) to Dare County Sheriff's Office; one (1) to Perquimans County Sheriff's Office; one (1) to NC Highway Patrol; one (1) to Southern Shores Police Department; and one (1) to the Kitty Hawk Police Department.

ECPD has seven cadets in the spring 2025 BLET class who are receiving a starting salary of \$39,684. Our cadets are in training with cadets from other agencies who are being paid \$46,800 to \$53,000. Salary has and will continue to be the driving force for the ECPD losing some or all our cadets during this BLET session. Departments from the surrounding areas are fully aware that our cadets are amongst the lowest paid. As a result, other agencies are actively recruiting our cadets with higher wages and in many cases, a drastically lower workload. Neighboring department administrators know our cadets have passed already successfully passed a background investigation and would be an easy acquisition.

Officer retention is the most pressing concern for our agency. The ECPD is allotted 66 sworn personnel. In January 2023, eight (8) sworn positions were frozen in order for the City Council to approve a \$6,500 salary increase for all sworn officers. This was helpful but still left ECPD salaries lower than several neighboring agencies. Currently, we have 23 open positions and only 35 sworn officers. Of those 35 personnel, 24 sworn officers are in the Uniformed Patrol Division. We have four (4) Detectives, two (2) Criminal Intelligence Officers, one (1) Crime Scene Investigator, one (1) Community Policing Officer, and three (3) Administrative Officers. Some of our current staff are exploring opportunities with other agencies who are offering higher salaries. Losing additional officers will force a transfer of our limited Investigators and Intelligence officers to the Patrol Division to answer calls for service within the city. The City has invested a lot of funding into technology to help with intelligence. Serious crimes will go unsolved and an increase in crime can be expected due to the lack of apprehended criminals. Transfers have, and will continue to impact department morale and will undoubtedly cause some staff to seek other employment. The ECPD is already functioning at a "bare minimum" staffing level. As staffing continues to fall, there will need to be discussions between the ECPD and City Administration to decide at what level to suspend patrol operations during certain hours of the day.

Requesting outside assistance is becoming an ever-increasing need. The Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office already conducts overlapping patrols in the city and assists on calls for service when needed. Requesting expanded assistance, such as conducting regular patrol when we lack resources, from the Sheriff's Office would be costly. On September 5, 2024, the Sheriff's Office directed that all requests for law enforcement assistance with Special Events such as the Christmas Parade and ECSU's Homecoming must go to their Off Duty Management. Using one of their deputies for events such as these will cost the City \$46.30 per hour; a 12-hour shift will cost \$555.66. The minimum shift strength for a patrol squad is five officers; using five deputies would cost \$2,778 for a single 12-hour shift. The annual cost to utilize one deputy would be \$101,119.2; five deputies would cost the City \$505,596.00. This does not include the cost to have coverage for major events in the City such as the Coast Guard Marathon, the Potato Festival, Fourth of July, Homecoming, the Christmas Parade, etc.

When there aren't enough police officers, it can lead to:

- Increased crime
- Reduced services
- Longer wait times for calls
- Fewer crimes solved
- Overworked officers
- Officers making poor decisions
- Officers with mental health issues
- Officers with less time for training
- Officers with less time for policy review
- Officers held back from extreme situations
- Officers experiencing fatigue and increased stress
- Officers experiencing health issues
- Officers expected to address complex social issues
- Officers expected to have new, more extensive skill sets

We propose an adjustment to the current salary structure. These adjustments will help retain our current officers and possibly lead to the return of some former officers. Additionally, these adjustments will ease salary compression between the different officer ranks. The salaries in the chart below will place the Elizabeth City Police Department on a more competitive level with surrounding agencies.

CLASS TITLE	CURRENT SALARY	ADJUSTED SALARY	DIFFERENCE	Current # OF STAFF	COST
Police Recruit	\$39,684	\$50,000	\$10,316	X 7 =	\$72,212
Probationary Officer	\$44,379	\$52,250	\$7,871	X 8 =	\$62,968
Police Officer I	\$48,241	\$55,000	\$6,759	X 4 =	\$27,036
Police Officer II	\$50,318	\$60,000	\$9,682	X 4 =	\$38,728
Police Officer III	\$52,499	\$65,000	\$12,501	X 2 =	\$25,002
Detective	\$54,790	\$67,500	\$12,710	X 6 =	\$76,260
Sergeants	\$62,371	\$70,000	\$7,629	X 6 =	\$45,774
Lieutenant	\$74,369	\$80,000	\$5,631	X 3 =	\$16,893
Captain	\$77,753	\$87,000	\$9,247	X 1 =	\$9,247
Deputy Chief	\$85,036	\$94,000	\$8,964	X 0 =	\$0
Chief	\$97,073	\$103,000	\$5,927	X 1 =	\$5,927
				TOTAL	\$380,047

The Elizabeth City Police Department had \$396,874.69 in lapsed salaries as of December 30, 2024 available to fund the proposed salary adjustment. This figure is

based on the number of sworn vacancies since July 2024 (when the current FY2024-2025 budget was approved). The ECPD will need to freeze seven (7) sworn positions in FY2025 – 2026 to sustain this increase. Seven (7) positions frozen will total \$436,043.16 in salaries and benefits. The ECPD is projected to have approximately \$965,248.64 remaining in lapsed salaries and benefits for FY2024-2025. If this request is approved, the Police Department will forgo the \$3,000 sign-on bonus and the \$1,000 recruitment incentive to offset any additional budgetary impacts.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, approve the recommended salary adjustment for all Elizabeth City Police Department Officers and Recruits.